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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RANGOON 000384

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STATE FOR EAP/MLS; PACOM FOR FPA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/20/2016

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [BM](#) [NLD](#)

SUBJECT: FORMER POLITICAL PRISONER DIES IN BRUTAL ATTACK

Classified By: Poloff Dean Tidwell for Reasons 1.4 (b, d)

¶11. (C) SUMMARY: A former political prisoner and student activist during the 1988 pro-democracy uprising, Thet Naing Oo, died on March 17 following a public beating by police and fire brigade officers. His family placed a death announcement in local newspapers and on March 20 held a funeral attended by over 1,000 mourners, including members of the political opposition. At a funeral earlier on the same day for a recently deceased NLD MP-elect, an unstable person with connections to the regime attempted, without success, to assault former student leader and political prisoner Min Ko Naing. The recent increase in threats and violent action against political opponents portends ominous developments.
END SUMMARY.

¶12. (SBU) Local police officers beat up former political prisoner Thet Naing Oo on March 17, claiming he was guilty of "public indecency," after he left his friends at a Rangoon teashop and urinated on a nearby corner, apparently on municipal property. Thet Naing Oo, who served four years in prison for his role as a student activist during the 1988 pro-democracy uprising and other political activities, became angry over the beating and returned to the scene with a knife.

¶13. (C) According to eyewitnesses and opposition party members, police officers and members of a local city fire brigade removed their uniforms and beat Thet Naing Oo severely in public view before detaining him and removing him from the scene. He died the next morning, following emergency surgery in the neurological unit of Yangon General Hospital. Embassy officers obtained photos from local activists, which indicate that Thet Naing Oo suffered massive head trauma. Authorities reportedly arrested Thet Naing Oo's two friends for "obstructing government officials in the line of duty" and continue to detain them incommunicado.

¶14. (U) Thet Naing Oo's family posted his death notice in local newspapers on March 19, without reference to the beating, and held his funeral on March 20. An estimated 1,000 mourners, including members of the pro-democracy movement and former political prisoners, attended the funeral. Former student activist leader and political prisoner Min Ko Naing, who attended the funeral, criticized the brutal attack and told international journalists that authorities have no right to beat citizens and should follow legal procedures if someone breaks the law.

¶15. (C) Thet Naing Oo's family has filed a complaint at a local police precinct and requested action against the officers for what the family has characterized as murder. According to NLD party officials, police officials have registered the complaint for possible follow-up.

¶16. (C) In a separate incident, Min Ko Naing attended a funeral earlier on March 20 for NLD MP-elect Dr. Thein Win, who recently died of cancer. At the funeral, an unstable man attempted to punch Min Ko Naing and shouted that he was doing so on behalf of the NLD. An elderly member of the "Veteran Politicians" chased off the would-be attacker with a walking cane. The assailant fled in his car, but NLD party members identified him as the son of a regime-selected delegate to the National Convention. The attacker did not injure Min Ko Naing, who later attended the Thet Naing Oo funeral without incident. Police later questioned Min Ko Naing about the attempted assault.

¶17. (C) COMMENT: Although the GOB is notorious for its egregious abuse of detainees, public beatings have generally been rare. According to NLD, however, the fatal beating of Thet Naing Oo is not an isolated incident. In recent months, NLD members and opposition activists have suffered an increase in beatings and violent actions at the hands of authorities and GOB-backed organizations in Rangoon and in other parts of Burma. NLD sources in Mandalay told us recently that members of the regime's mass member organization, the USDA, deliberately target them with motorcycles when they crossed the street. The government-controlled press has reported plans to arm the USDA and fire departments in the interests of "public safety." These ominous events could portend harsher action

from government thugs unleashed against the political
opposition. END COMMENT.
VILLAROSA